

The Temple and Altar of Worship

Text

Eph. 2:17-22 ¹⁷And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Memory Verse

2 Chr. 6:18 But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!

Introduction

Under the Old Testament, priests served in a physical temple according to a pattern that pointed forward to a greater reality (Col. 2:16-17).

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That temple was a shadow. The true and permanent sanctuary is not made with hands. It is the place where Christ, our High Priest, now ministers (Heb. 8:1-2, 5; 9:11, 23-24; 11:10).

The old temple had rules for worship that pointed to an eternal reality, which was opened up when Christ's body was broken (Heb. 9:1, 8; 10:19-22). So the question is: where does God dwell as His temple today?

Objective

To see that the Christian is God's dwelling place on earth, and that the heart is God's altar for sacrifice.

Presentation

1. The Believer's Body is God's Temple

Our partnership with God begins when we offer our bodies to Him (Rom. 12:1-2). Jesus made this clear when He spoke of His body as the true temple God had foreshadowed (John 2:18-21).

All Christians, both individually and collectively, are called God's building (1 Cor. 3:9) and the body of Christ (Col. 1:18, 24; Eph. 4:15). The only

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offering God consistently asks for is our bodies, given back to Him in worship.

2. The Believer's Heart is God's Altar

An altar is where sacrifice happens. Without an altar, nothing offered to God is received. Since God gives life to His worshippers through the heart, He tells us to guard it carefully (Prov. 4:23).

The heart is also where the battle is fought. Sin defiles us to death through the heart (Mark 7:17-23), but God cleanses us to life through His word (Col. 3:15-16). "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." (John 15:3)

When the heart is clean, the person is truly clean.

Conclusion

Eph. 2:20-22 says that we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. The prophets predicted that the Messiah would come (1 Pet. 1:10-12). The apostles proclaimed that He had come. Their ministry was to prove that Jesus is the Christ.

But Christ's ministry was never meant to be followed in a merely physical way. His earthly

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appearance was to provide holy blood and water (2 Cor. 5:16). His temple and altar must be of the same spiritual nature as He is (John 18:36; 4:23-24). God does not dwell in man-made temples and altars, because that would reduce Him to an idol (Acts 17:16, 24-25).

Solomon himself said the temple was not built to contain God (2 Chr. 6:18).

God must be worshipped everywhere (Ps. 139:7-12).

Evaluation Questions & Answers

1. Why does God refuse to live in man-made temples?

- * Because God is Spirit and cannot be confined to a building. He dwells in people, not in structures made by human hands.

Acts 7:48-50 ⁴⁸ *However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: ⁴⁹ ‘Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, Or what is the place of My rest? ⁵⁰ Has My hand not made all these things?’*

1 Cor. 3:16 *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

2. The temple is a building. What does God use as building materials?

- * God builds His spiritual temple with living believers, joined together in Christ.

1 Pet. 2:5 *You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

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Eph. 2:21 *In whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*

3. How are we built upon the apostles and prophets of God as our foundation?

- * The prophets foretold Christ's coming, and the apostles proclaimed that He had come. Their testimony about Jesus is the foundation on which we stand.

Eph. 2:20 *Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.*

2 Pet. 1:19 *And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.*

4. For the devil to “devour us” (1 Pet. 5:8) where does he target?

- * The devil targets the heart, because from the heart flow our thoughts, words, and actions.

Matt. 15:19 *Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the*

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kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Prov. 4:23 *Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.*

Prayer

Father, thank You for making us Your dwelling place. Make our bodies pure for You, and make our hearts an altar where Your Spirit works freely. Amen.